

SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT: A MODEL OF IMPLEMENTATION FOR MALAYSIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Educational reform is a worldwide movement since the last two decades. The educational authorities around the world have embarked upon an exercise known as the restructuring of education. Major changes in how schools are managed and organized have taken place in school systems of England and Wales, Canada, the United States, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Australia, and Indonesia. The origin of the movement can be associated with the introduction of an education voucher system in the United States in the early 1970s. However, it has become a movement in the early 1980s in the United States and the United Kingdom where decision-making had shifted to schools for some elements of organization. School effectiveness and school improvement provide the strong justification for restructuring activities, and the movement towards school-based management as the common implementation strategy.

Similar development has taken place in the Malaysian education system when the idea of decentralization was mooted more than a decade ago. However, the adoption of the concept is debatable, and it was not well-received especially at the political level. Malaysian public educational management is highly centralized with the Ministry of Education at the center, exercising power and authority over State Education Departments, District Education Departments, Teacher Training Colleges, and schools. The management structure of the educational organizations, including schools is predominantly bureaucratic with hierarchy of authority levels. The main rationale for such system and structure is the need for strong central control which is believed to contribute towards nation-building. But the strong wave of educational reform has placed tremendous pressure on the government, especially the Ministry of Education to reconsider the adoption and implementation of decentralization of education.

Some aspects of the reform movement have been implemented in Malaysian schools, such as the effective school, quality assurance for school, school improvement, and self-managing school (especially for private schools). In November 2006 the Malaysian government launched a blueprint for educational development, or "Pelan Induk Pembangunan Pendidikan" (PIPP) for the period of 2006 to 2010. This strategic plan put forth six strategic thrusts for future educational development with the human capital development as its core. Under the sixth thrust, namely striving for educational institutions' excellence, the blueprint proposes granting greater autonomy to schools. A program, known as "the cluster schools" was launched to implement the strategy.

This paper presents the initial results and findings of a research project undertaken by a group of researchers from the Faculty of Education, University of Malaya. The research focuses on the concept and practices of school-based management in Malaysian public primary schools.

Objective

The objective of the research is to examine the relationships between organizational tendencies and leadership strategies of headmasters in the implementation of school-based management in government's primary schools in Malaysia.

Review of Literature

School-based management has been characterized in a number of different ways and definitions. Two comprehensive definitions were offered by Malen, Ogawa, and Kranz (1990); and Hallinger, Murphy, and Hausman (1992), respectively. Malen, et.al defined "School-based management can be viewed conceptually as a formal alteration of governance structures, as a form of

decentralisation that identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement and relies on the redistribution of decision making authority as the primary means through which improvements might be stimulated and sustained". Hallinger et al. (1992) defined school-based management as efforts to decentralize educational organization, management, and maintenance; and bring such infrastructure closer to the stakeholders; create new roles and responsibilities for all actors in the system; and transform the teaching and learning process in classrooms. This model encompasses the planning of education where empowerment and responsibility for school functioning is shared between the central office and the school-based personnel who work on the basis of cooperation, both collegial, and professional.

School-based management demands greater participation from the staff and parents in the school decision making process. Decisions are collectively and collegially made by relevant stakeholders, rather than the principal or his representative.

Devolution of authority is the fundamental concept in school-based management. Under this system of governance, schools, in effect, become deregulated from the central office. The basic message is one of expanded local control and influence with schools being given greater responsibility for their own affairs. The strategy of improvement is bottom-up change. School-based management is thus primarily an alteration in organizational arrangements in school systems. Authority and influence pass from higher to lower levels of organization. Structural changes often accompany this devolution of authority. Internally, school-based management redistributes the decentralized authority to be shared by teachers, parents and other community members and, sometimes, students. Thus shared decision making among key stakeholders at the local level becomes a defining characteristic of school-based management.

To maximize school performance with decentralized authority, schools need to control their resources. Four critical school resources that need to be decentralized are power, knowledge, information, and rewards. The main focus of school-based management has been the decentralization of power. Power is shifted most often from the central administration to a council at the school site. The council may be composed of administrators, teachers, parents, community members and sometimes students. In this way, school-based management empowers groups who typically have not had much power in managing schools. Beside group empowerment, a strong central leader, such as the principal, is key to successful management. An effective leader can set the school's vision, serves as an instructional leader, coordinates reform efforts and rallies support for the school. The transfer of power can be effected using four strategies: self-contained teams, mini-enterprises, special purpose or parallel structures, and representative task teams.

Implementation of School-based Management

Many researches conducted on the implementation of school-based management revealed that there are so many variations in its practice. Under the system the authority can transfer from the state government to school boards, from school boards to superintendents, from superintendents to principals, from principals to other members of the school community such as teachers and parents, or some combination of two or more of these. Besides, schools and districts implementing school-based management vary widely in what decisions are distributed. A school may have an active school council – made up of teachers, parents, and the principal – involved in drawing up budgets, hiring and firing, and determining curriculum. Other school councils merely advise the principal in such decisions. Or the council membership might be only teachers, or the council's decisions may be limited to such topics as fundraising or textbook selection.

The Research Framework

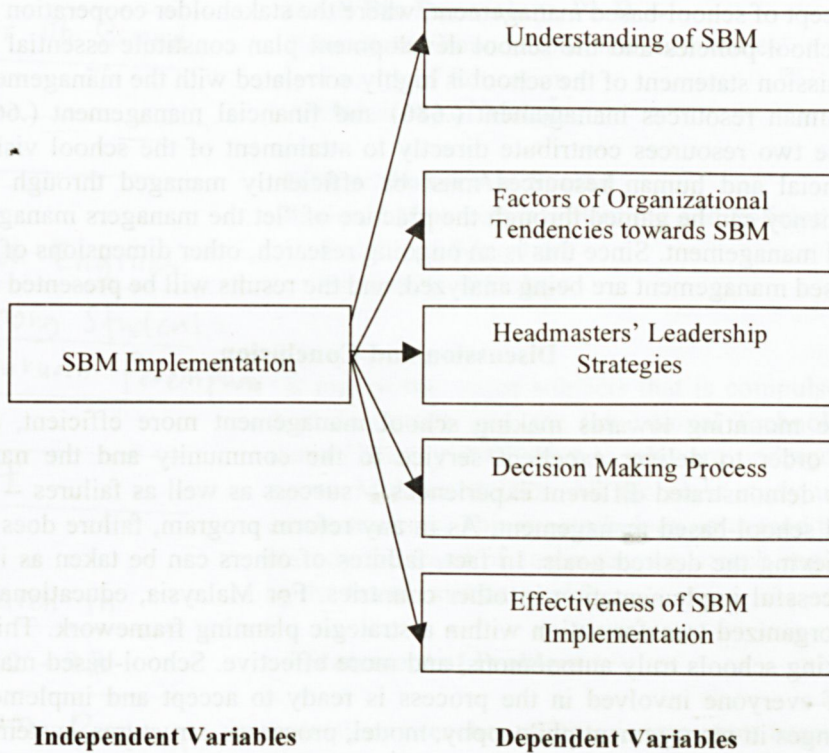


Figure 1. The research framework

In consonance with the research objective, the framework examines the relationships between school-based management implementation with five major aspects of school-based management, namely the understanding of the concept of school-based management, organizational tendencies towards school-based management, headmasters' leadership strategies, decision-making process; and effectiveness of school-based management implementation. However, in this paper, the relationship between school-based management implementation and only two aspects are examined, namely the organizational tendencies towards school-based management, and headmasters' leadership strategies. The research hypothesis states that there is significant difference in terms of statistics between the factors of organizational tendency towards school-based management with the headmasters' leadership strategies in the implementation of school-based management in primary schools. The null hypothesis states that there are no significant differences between these variables. This research employs a quantitative approach using survey method. The research questionnaire was developed and tested for reliability and validity, with Cronbach alpha value of .96. The survey was conducted at primary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Perak, using a sample of 927 respondents.

Findings

The findings clearly show that the role of school principal is highly correlated with the schools' vision and mission (.841), schools' financial management (.694) and human resource management (.622). These results support the notion that the school headmaster, as a leader, plays a crucial role in formulating and implementing the school's vision and mission, to strategically chart the future direction and core business of the school. The headmaster is also involved in managing two important school resources, namely financial and human resources. This is consistent with the concept of autonomy in managing resources under the school-based management strategy.

The role of teachers, parents and community is strongly correlated with the school vision and mission (.723). It signifies the importance of their involvement and contributions towards formulating and implementing the school vision and mission. These findings are also consistent with the concept of school-based management, where the stakeholder cooperation and involvement in shaping school policies and the school development plan constitute essential ingredients. The vision and mission statement of the school is highly correlated with the management of two school resources, human resources management (.686) and financial management (.661). It is logical because these two resources contribute directly to attainment of the school vision and mission. Hence, financial and human resources must be efficiently managed through decentralization. Greater efficiency can be gained through the practice of "let the managers manage", a tenet under school-based management. Since this is an ongoing research, other dimensions of the relationships in school-based management are being analyzed, and the results will be presented in another paper.

Discussion and Conclusion

Pressures are mounting towards making school management more efficient, autonomous and effective in order to deliver excellent service to the community and the nation. Worldwide evidence has demonstrated different experiences -- success as well as failures -- in countries that implemented school-based management. As in any reform program, failure does not deter efforts towards achieving the desired goals. In fact, failures of others can be taken as important lessons towards successful implementation in other countries. For Malaysia, educational management is undergoing organized transformation within a strategic planning framework. This paved the way towards making schools truly autonomous, and more effective. School-based management can be successful if everyone involved in the process is ready to accept and implement it. Readiness includes changes in management philosophy, model, processes, structures, systems, organizational and managerial culture. Most importantly, political commitment becomes the determining factor of successful implementation of school-based management in Malaysia.

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